

should still be done quietly.

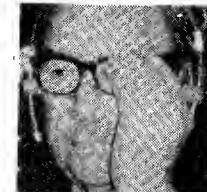
The other way of raising the cost to Russia of another cold winter in Afghanistan is by squeezing the food and technology transfers on which the Soviet economy has come to depend. Like the Olympic boycott, President Carter's trade sanctions have not been very effective so far (see page 72) and American exporters have borne by far the largest share of the burden. The Russians seem to have made up most of their lost American grain from other sources; and the loss of long-term industrial projects will take time to hit. This is why a partial trade embargo will persuade the Russians to change their strategy in Afghanistan only if they first become convinced that a quick win is impossible, and that sanctions will be as prolonged as their own occupation—and may spread as time goes on.

The costs of remaining in Afghanistan, as the Russians calculate them today, are unlikely to look intolerable. But it is important that they should be able to

read the other side of the ledger. The west, in co-operation with Afghanistan's neighbours, should reaffirm its readiness to provide a face-saver in the form of some version of the Carrington neutrality plan, enshrined if necessary in a formal Austrian-type treaty. But if this plan is to be fitted in with recent Soviet-Afghan proposals, the Russians will have to accept (a) that nobody can deliver an end to the insurgency, which will come about only as the result of a political settlement; and (b) that Soviet troop withdrawals will have to accompany, not follow, any action to stop arms aid or restrict guerrilla sanctuaries.

The Russians and their clients are not the only parties to the Afghan dispute unready for serious negotiations. At the end of last month the umpteenth quest for unity by rebel leaders in Peshawar came to nothing. The rebels too need reminding that, unless they can provide a political alternative, they will lose the war.

Do they hear Jenkins?



No, because the fight to decide the course of Britain's opposition is still locked inside the Labour party

In 1984, Britain could be faced with an alternative government committed to unilateral disarmament, nationalisation of commercial banks and pension funds, the abolition of private education and health services, and the delegation of economic strategy to the trade union movement. Such a government would be supported in office by members of parliament at the mercy of left-wing constituency cliques, its policy dictated annually at Labour party conferences dominated by phoney union majorities.

For those who may be finding Mrs Thatcher's brand of economic liberalism too crude a brew, such an alternative is no alternative at all. It is a denial of the traditional social democratic commitment to freedom of individual choice in a mixed economy; it is economically irresponsible and a surrender to precisely the forces which have so harmed Britain over the past decade. Hardly surprising, then, that last week eyes were misting over as once again Mr Roy Jenkins daintily tripped across the Channel to smile at the media and tease them with talk of "great and hitherto untapped reserves of political energy".

Two centres are one too many

Almost everything Mr Jenkins says is true: the incompatibilities within the Labour party, the danger of identification of parties with sectional interests, the evils of constant public-sector expansionism. There may indeed be, as he implies, growing support for a "radical centre" in British politics—a recoining of *The Economist's* long-ago phrase, the "extreme centre"; though between Mrs Thatcher and Mr Benn a more appropriate phrase today might be conservative centre. The sophisticated elector would doubtless love to be

able to debate the nuance of a Howe economy against a Jenkins one—perhaps a touch more on the accelerator here, my dear chap, a willingness to turn the steering wheel there?—and cast his vote accordingly. Such has been the dream of "moderate men of sound judgment" since Trollope—and before.

It is all magnificent, but it is not war. Mr Jenkins and many in the Labour party have long suffered the agony of wearing a party shoe in which their feet do not fit. They noticed years ago (to quote Mr Jenkins on Monday) that there is "mounting evidence from all over the world that full-scale state ownership is more successful in producing tyranny than in producing goods". They were not socialists yet dared not admit it, and so fell to mumbling about great coalitions and marriages of interests. Now Mr Jenkins is falling into the same trap again. His views are better represented by a party twice the age of Labour, called the Liberal party. In its strong Europeanism it is balm to Mr Jenkins's many Brussels wounds. And it was talking about the "radical centre" when Mr Jenkins was still bellowing the Red Flag at Labour party conferences.

After so many decades out of power, the Liberals do now look jejune. Their switch of tactics into community politics may seem tiresomely parochial to Mr Jenkins and his friends (whose fastidiousness at the grass roots is to blame for some of Labour's present plight). But the section of the electorate to which he is appealing is broadly that covered by the 15-20% from which Liberalism and (more dottily) Scottish and Welsh nationalisms currently draw their support. They are no mean base on which to build a new radical centre (over 5m votes at the last election, or nearly half those for Labour). But, as things now stand, to get that base

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Stuck in Afghanistan

mtsc

The Russians are in widening and deepening trouble in Afghanistan. Widening, as the rebels take their hit-and-run war against the invaders from the Iranian border to the Pakistani one, and into the capital, Kabul. Deepening, as the resistance is joined by schoolgirls, shopkeepers and estranged members of Mr Babrak Karmal's communist government. Five months' bitter experience in Afghanistan should have forced two conclusions on rational Russian minds: first, that a clear military victory over the insurgents will be impossible with the present level of Soviet forces in Afghanistan; second, that the Russians can no longer hope to establish a pro-Soviet Afghan government and army capable of surviving the departure of Soviet troops.

This week's airlift of an estimated 10,000 Soviet soldiers to reinforce the cordon around Kabul does not prove that the Russians have conceded the first point; they have been shuttling troops in and out of Afghanistan throughout the past five months. But it does confirm that the Soviet force is increasingly overstretched. And while accounts of the fighting are more confused and conflicting than ever, with reports from the rebel refuge of Pakistan sounding strangely soberer than those from Delhi (see page 43), what is indisputable is that the 100,000-strong Soviet army is further today from imposing a Pax Sovietica on Afghanistan than it was at the turn of the year.

The Russians' political failure is just as blatant. This too was underlined this week with news of a new round of executions, of street battles between rival factions of the communist party, and of a split between President Babrak Karmal and his number two. Should-be defenders of the government in the Afghan army were said to be defecting to the guerrillas around Kabul, while military recruiting teams put out house-to-house dragnets to fill the depleted ranks of the Afghan forces, now reckoned to be down to a third of their old strength.

Even if enough able-bodied Afghans are eventually drafted to reconstitute an 80,000-man Afghan army, the job of turning a reluctant rabble into an adequately trained and officered force might take years. Even then, there is every reason to doubt that it could ever be developed into a politically reliable instrument that would fight against fellow-Afghans rather than turn against the Russians and their local stooges. And without an army to prop him up, a Babrak Karmal or

successor Soviet client would not last a day.

So the Russians are left with two choices. One is to continue reinforcing their troops in Afghanistan until they can crush the insurgency—which may be feasible, but could take half a million men—and then settle down to a permanent occupation. The other is to negotiate a political settlement that would allow them to withdraw. Both will involve heavy sacrifices: the first, of men and resources; the second, of political aspirations. What the seven leaders of the non-communist world should be talking about in Venice a week hence is how to influence Soviet cost-accounting in favour of the second option.

Stick, carrot

This means raising the costs to the Russians of pursuing their Afghan adventure and at the same time defining the terms and opening the channels for negotiations. The military costs for Russia can be affected from outside only by stepping up arms supplies to the rebels. Weapons are undoubtedly getting through to them now, probably through at least two of the three unclosable borders—with Iran, with Pakistan and, maybe, the barely passable one with China—and probably from several foreign sources. But for all their disinformation about a foreign-sponsored counter-revolution, the Russians must be well aware that external aid has so far played only a marginal role in the Afghan resistance; the challenge is so durable precisely because it is spontaneous and indigenous.

There are dangers in increasing arms aid to the rebels much beyond the present, admirable, bounds of discretion. It could turn Afghanistan into what has already, inaccurately, been described as a proxy war between the superpowers, and thus diminish support for an anti-Soviet stand among non-aligned and Moslem countries. It could commit the arms suppliers over-closely to an Islamic fundamentalist movement that may yet turn out to be as inimical to western interests as Ayatollah Khomeini's in Iran. Furthermore, no amount of weapons would necessarily be enough to prevent the Russians from crushing the insurgents if they decide to push for victory at all costs. The aid pipeline should be open wide enough to enable the Afghans to convince the Russians that they cannot win without such an open-ended commitment, and perhaps not even then; and it